

# CHAPTER 1

## THE THREE CONQUERORS

**I**n the middle of the Den Forest, one of the many wolf packs throughout the Wild North was settling safely as dusk ended. They distributed the remaining meals and gathered.

“Is everyone here? Okay, good, because tonight, I’m going to tell you the Wild North’s greatest story!” their mother explained, as her five pups gazed in awe. “Throughout the Wild North’s forests, mountains, valleys, and rivers, one story is known to all the animals, and that is the story of the Three Conquerors. These conquerors were wolves, yet they did not hunt in a traditional pack. They hunted and conquered with their brothers. No one led the brothers since they made decisions and acted as one. They were known as the Three Conquerors because no one knew their actual names, if they even had names. All everyone knows now is their legacy. They were last seen before my time, so to many, they are simply a folklore legend.”

She took a second to look at her pup’s amazed faces. They were all speechless, intently listening. As their leader, the only female who led any of the packs, she worried about their future in the Den Forest. Naya was glad she’d gotten them together to share with them their legacy. She had to prepare them for life ... but a little at a time. They were starting to lean into their instincts, but they needed some guidance and fair warning before it was too late.

“Long ago, all of the Wild North’s many wolf packs were fighting over each other’s land. Soon, the many small battles between packs merged into two distinct sides. There were wolf packs intent on spreading life and willing to compromise over the territories. Then, there were wolf packs who wanted to destroy their competitors and rule the land.

“The evil packs united under Renchen, calling themselves the Nightstalkers. They became more powerful and vaster in numbers, compared to the others. The Nightstalkers were an unknown wolf breed. Once a wolf joined their pack, the wolf was brought to the Dark Hills for a terrible ritual. The Nightstalkers would savagely remove all the wolf’s fur before covering their exposed skin with their enemies’ blood which was mixed with special dirt from the Dark Hills. This mixture made their fur never grow back, making these beasts terrifying to look at, while it surprisingly still allowed them to venture into the cold.

“So, the valleys fell into war. The Three Conquerors fought on the side of good, but after a large successful battle, they disappeared to protect the defenseless outskirts. When the war was at its prime, the Three Conquerors returned with newly recruited wolves. The Nightstalkers, infuriated with the Three Conquerors’ return, launched an overwhelming attack that surrounded our ancestors. During a long, brutal battle, the outnumbered good packs defended for hours. Just as the end seemed inevitable, the Three Conquerors broke through the Nightstalkers’ attack and killed Renchen. With their pack ruler gone, the Nightstalkers were defeated, leaving Renchen’s sons Viking and Grug in command. When the Nightstalkers fled the battlefield, a monstrous howl radiated forth from the Dark Hills, promising their return. Soon, the packs disappeared.”

“So, the good guys won?” a pup asked.

Their mother smiled, and continued, “All was well in the valleys ...”

When she was young, she had to learn the hard way that the Nightstalkers were something unusual, something devastating, that few wolves were ever prepared to face. The Nightstalker pack had no females, so when they attacked another pack, they killed the males for food and took the females for breeding, then food. They were known to the other packs as savages, with no point in life or reason to live other than to kill. She recalled the murderous wolf, Viking, with disgust.

She continued, “The Three Conquerors kept a leadership status over the valleys, and the packs were at peace. The oldest of the three finally started his own family. For once in his life, he found happiness. But the life of the Three Conquerors required them to travel to the far outskirts to keep order. Peace in the Wild North lasted for five wonderful years ... until one tragic day. One day, the Three Conquerors were forced to leave behind the oldest Conqueror’s mate and young pups. Then came a giant grizzly bear, Zabiss, who found the female and her pups. The bear, enraged at wolves, used his hatred to strike

down the newborns and their mother. By the time the Three Conquerors returned, all were dead.

“The oldest became blinded by anger toward himself for leaving his family defenseless and blinded by hatred toward all bears. He didn’t care if the valleys fell to chaos. He wanted revenge at all costs and devised a plan to get rid of the bears once and for all. The oldest Conqueror pleaded with the two younger Conquerors to come with him and seek revenge. He had lost his family, so they agreed.

“One stormy night, the three followed the bear’s scent to his den. The Three Conquerors attacked the den mercilessly. However, the rainy, dark night blinded the attacking Conquerors. This revengeful act led to tragedy. When their sight returned, they found out that they had killed the bear’s mate and two cubs. Zabiss returned to the scene to find his mate and cubs brutally slaughtered. The angered bear swiped toward the Three Conquerors, but the bear was quickly defeated and retreated to the outskirts of the Wild North. Zabiss swore to return, hunt, and kill the Three Conquerors and all of their kin to get his revenge. The eldest’s plan for revenge was successful. However, after killing the defenseless bear cubs, his brothers lost trust in him.

“The Three Conquerors left each other and disappeared. Many have guessed where the Three Conquerors went. Some say the youngest retreated to the Wild North’s outskirts with his need for solitude. Some believe the middle Conqueror remained in the forests for his love of life. But for the oldest, rumor says he is in hiding, plotting to finish his revenge. Without the Three Conquerors keeping the packs in peace, the valleys yet again fell to war, and the land could only watch as Viking and Grug brought back the Nightstalker Pack from the Dark Hills and plagued the land.

“After many years of war, in a desperate attempt to regain peace, the five strongest wolf packs united under one, named the Pack of Packs. But that is a story for another time. Now, off to bed,” their mother concluded, as her pups moaned and groaned for her to continue the story.

That night, one of her pups in particular had vivid dreams of being like the Three Conquerors with all the wolf packs cheering for him and chanting his name in unison ...

“Connor! ... Connor! ... Connor!”

Connor opened his eyes to see his sister, Taya, in his face.

“Stop kicking me in your sleep!” she whispered, as she scooted away from him, and curled up in a ball to close her eyes.

“Ugh, you just ruined the best dream.” Connor begrudgingly tried to fall back asleep. As he laid there staring at the cave’s ceiling, he pictured himself leading a pack of wolves against a great evil. Finally, he fell back to sleep, except now with a huge grin across his face.